

“The Nubians of the Jardin d’Acclimatation”

by Doctor Gustave Le Bon

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Robert K. Stevenson: Translator and Editor



Nubian warrior

Messieurs, it is my honor to place before the eyes of the Society photographs that I have taken and which show the Nubians of the Jardin d'Acclimatation.

These photographs present the Nubians in diverse poses. In order to indicate the scale of proportion, one can place on these pictures a strip of paper one decimeter in length, which permits one to determine the scale to which each photograph has been made. Among these photographs there is one which has especially attracted my attention. It depicts a naked Nubian, and looks like the drawing known under the name of Canon of Lepsius. This drawing was discovered on an Egyptian tomb, and is marked by crossed lines as if one had desired to note the dimensions of the body. It is remarkable that this particular drawing corresponds so closely to the photograph of our Nubian.

DISCUSSION

Doctor PAUL BROCA. I occasion last year (see the *Bulletins* for 1878, page 305) to point out to the Society this singular fact: that the proportions found in classical Greek sculpture, mainly those concerning the limbs, appear to have been borrowed from the Ethiopian type. We know that the antibrachial index of Negroes is substantially greater than our own, this being so on the one hand from the elongation of their forearms and, on the other hand and above all, by the shortness of their upper arms, for their humerus is not only much shorter with respect to their radius, but also with respect to their femur and tibia. I must remind you of how Professor Fock, fancying to redo the missing broken-off arms of the *Apollo of the Belvedere*, attempted to procure a skeleton that conformed to the proportions seen in Greek statuary; after making a large photograph of the restored statue, he began sketching the outlines of skeletons over this photograph, and was unable to find any European skeleton that presented the same proportions. Monsieur Vasseur, who has addressed himself to this effect, advised me—and I can verify—that the proportions of the limbs of the skeleton sketched over the photograph were those of a Negro. This situation exists not just on the *Apollo of the Belvedere*, but also one can make this same observation with respect to many other art works of antiquity.

Now, in searching for an explanation of this fact, I recall that Diodorus of Sicily, at the end of his first book, recounts by means of a legend that he supports that the rules applicable to Greek statuary had been imported from Egypt. I have therefore been led to suppose that the Ethiopian qualities of Greek sculptural works have been borrowed from corresponding Egyptian works.

The Negroid proportions found in Egyptian statuary can be easily accounted for once one understands the prudish views of the Orientals. Although very libidinous in many of their acts, they regard it as contrary to their dignity to appear naked for examination or image reproduction purposes. Even today it is extremely difficult for them to decide to allow themselves to be seen or photographed without any clothing on. Therefore it was very probably slaves, that is to say, Negroes, which the sculptors of ancient Egypt had posing before them. And given that men back then believed (and still did, up to the beginning of this century) that people of all races possessed the same bodily dimensions, and only differed in color, one did not hesitate to assign to a white person the same proportions that one had only measured on the Negro. Your photograph, Doctor Le Bon, provides additional confirmation of this point of mine, and for this reason seems to me worthy of attention.

Monsieur GAULTIER DE CLAUBRY. I must point out, Doctor Broca, that the *Apollo of the Belvedere*, so admirable that it is, dates from a relatively recent epoch, and other statues of similar age often display its elongated nature. This same remark is applicable to the *Gladiator*. These two statues cannot be regarded as types of ancient statuary, and, in fact, it would be of much greater value to study, for example, the *Achilles* at the Louvre.



The Gladiator

Doctor PAUL BROCA. Monsieur de Claubry, my research was not conducted just on the *Apollo of the Belvedere*, but also was performed on a series of ancient statues, as well as on some engravings and paintings from Pompeii that I had photographed. I was especially able to measure from a painting the proportions of a Pompeian woman the instant that she threw a veil over the skeleton of her son. This particular painting is also interesting from another point of view. It is said that the ancients did not understand well the human skeleton, and Galen has been cited as having occasion, not by possessing one, but to study one from a hanging. However, the painting that I've just referred to depicts a skeleton exactly.

All these statues and drawings, whether examined from the original or from their photographs, have led me to the same conclusion. It is true, though, that I have mainly applied myself to investigating the proportions of the upper limb.



Apollo of the Belvedere